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SOUTHWEST MONSOON MAKES ONSET OVER NICOBAR ISLANDS

Southwest monsoon made its onset over the Nicobar Islands, India's southernmost region, on Sunday, the India Meteorological Department said

TO REACH MAINLAND INDIA BY MAY 31

As per the weather office, the southwest monsoon has advanced into some parts of the Maldives, South Bay of Bengal, Nicobar Islands and South Andaman Sea on Sunday. The monsoon is expected to reach Kerala on May 31 as against June 8 last year. Large parts of the country are battling a brutal heatwave, which has shattered multiple temperature records | P7

RED ALERT IN THREE KERALA DISTRICTS

- Last month, the weather office had forecast above-normal rain in the monsoon season in India with favourable La Nina conditions
- Rain lashed many parts of Kerala on Sunday, prompting authorities to issue red alerts in three districts — Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Idukki and orange alerts in four — T'puram, Kollam, Alappuzha, and Ernakulam

52%

OF INDIA'S NET CULTIVATED AREA DEPEND ON MONSOON RAINS FOR IRRIGATION

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

U.P. DIARIES

NO PUSHPAK VIMAN FOR THE AYODHYA-WAASI

SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA
EDITOR

AYODHYA: "Ram maryada purushottam, Rajputo ka Rajput," says the man in saffron regalia as a throwaway line, while putting a tika on those walking towards the temple. Whoever thought of Ram in caste terms? That idiom-like Hindi phrasing combines the old philosophical ideal with a medieval-modern folk twist. Ram, the ideal man, is also "the Rajput among Rajputs".

In the polling booth-bound Ayodhya of 2024, much of it boils down to just that. The caste equations of candidates. The mammoth new temple notwithstanding, the Ayodhya that is voting today is not quite the Ayodhya of the Ramayana. The various textual versions of the epic were anyway accessible only to the privileged scholar. For the ordinary Indian, it was mostly received as oral literature—subject to the fashion and predilections of the day. So it figures that, in today's rendition, local caste factors hold as much sway as any grand project of religious-cultural reclamation.

For the rest of India, the Ram temple may have held out high symbolism, but right in the heart of Ayodhya, what they think about while queuing up in the heat wave to exercise their franchise is how to try and turn the little epics of their own lives towards small victories. The constituency, unlike the district, still bears the charming but humdrum name Faizabad, and they have no Pushpak viman that can take their ambitions soaring beyond the question of rozi-roti, or basic economic sufficiency.

DECIDE — LAST OF A FOUR PART SERIES

That acquires some paradoxical resonance when you consider that whether the BJP wins or not depends as much on Ram and the Modi and Yogi factor "as it depends on Karl Marx". The Lok Sabha contest is between sitting MP Lallu Singh of the BJP and sitting Bikapur MLA Awadhesh Prasad of the SP.

Will Lallu Singh overcome anti-incumbency and triumph a third time in a row? That could hinge on how many votes Arvind Sen of the Communist Party of India pulls away.

CONTINUED ON: P7

Stakes high for BJP in 5th phase of LS elections today

Prominent leaders including Rajnath Singh, Smriti Irani, Rahul in fray

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

THE fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls on Monday for 49 seats in six states and two Union territories will decide the electoral fate of several prominent leaders, including Union ministers.

BJP leaders Rajnath Singh, Smriti Irani, Piyush Goyal, and Rajiv Pratap Rudy are in the fray as are several other prominent figures including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah.

Among the Union ministers, Rajnath Singh is eyeing a fourth term from Lucknow, where he is locked in a fight with Samajwadi Party's Ravidas Mehrotra. Smriti Irani is seeking a second term from Amethi, while Piyush Goyal is contesting from Mumbai North. Goyal has so far been elected to the Upper House of Parliament but this time, the BJP has fielded him against Bhushan Patil of the Congress.

PHASE 5 FACTOIDS

49 seats in 6 states & 2 UTs

8.95 cr eligible voters, of which 4.26 cr are women

9.47 lakh polling officials across 94,732 polling stations

14 seats of Uttar Pradesh, **13** of Maharashtra, **7** of West Bengal, **5** seats each of Odisha and Bihar, **3** of Jharkhand, and 1 seat each in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh will go to polls

35 Assembly Constituencies of the Odisha Legislative Assembly will also go to polls on Monday

NEXT PHASE OF ELECTIONS TO BE HELD ON MAY 25

Union ministers Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma and Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti are contesting from Uttar Pradesh's Jalaun and Fatehpur, respectively.

The stakes are high for the BJP as the party had won 32 of these 49 seats in 2019.

Rahul Gandhi, who has contested from Wayanad in Kerala, is also in the fight for Rae Bareli.

Among other candidates, Union ministers Shantanu Thakur and Kaushal Kishor are contesting from Bangaon (West Bengal) and Mohanlalganj (Uttar Pradesh, respectively).

In Ladakh, Congress candidate Tsering Namgyal, BJP's Tashi Gyalson, and Independent candidate and NC rebel Haji Hanifa Jan are locked in a keen contest.

Voting will also be held in 35 assembly constituencies in Odisha, where BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is among the candidates. Patnaik is contesting from two assembly segments — Hinjili under the Aska Lok Sabha seat in Ganjam district and Kantabanji under the Bolangir parliamentary constituency.

Polling for 23 states and Union territories and 379 seats has been completed so far. The sixth phase of polls will be held on May 25.

daCunha/AB/944

INTERVIEW

BJP will win more seats than in 2019: J P Nadda

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

THE Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will win more seats in this election than it did in 2019 and will reach its target of 370 seats, a confident party president J P Nadda told this newspaper in an interview.

He said the party will win many seats in south India this time as a result of its systematic electioneering and the works done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in the past 10 years. "We are getting massive support from across the nation. We are going to break certain myths about the BJPs' prospects in the southern states," he said.

He claimed that the INDI alliance will not cross the 150-mark. People are voting to give Modi a record third term to see the 'Viksit-Bharat' by 2047, the BJP chief said. Nadda claimed that the saffron party has already won 270 seats in the four phases of elections held so far, and that more will be added in the the upcoming phases.

Nadda said the Modi government has brought down inflation to below 5% and created great job opportunities. He rejected Kejriwal's claim that Modi will step down once he reaches 75 years of age next year. "There is no such provision in the BJP's constitution," he said. P8

CHOPPER CARRYING IRAN PREZ CRASHES P9

AI Exp flight catches fire mid-air, all safe

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

ALL the 179 passengers, including two infants and 6 crew members on board an Air India Express flight from Bengaluru to Kochi, had a miraculous escape when one of its engines caught fire after taking off from the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) on Saturday night.

The flight, IX 1132 – which took off at 10.49 pm, returned to Bengaluru and had an emergency landing on the South Runway at 11.12 pm. All the passengers were evacuated safely. An emergency was declared at the airport and the South Runway was shut for over three hours.

According to a spokesperson of Bangalore International Airport Ltd, "On May 18, IX 1132 made an emergency landing at Bengaluru airport at 11.12 pm due to a reported fire in one of the engines. A full-scale emergency was declared and the fire was promptly extinguished on landing. All 179 passengers and six crew members have been successfully evacuated from the aircraft."

In the rush to get out of the aircraft after landing, at least 15 flyers suffered cuts and bruises. Many were taken by ambulance to the Aster Medical Centre on the airport premises and administered first-aid.

A source said the engine of the Airbus A320 aircraft caught fire after the plane flew for a few minutes.

CONTINUED ON: P2

CITYZENS TO THE FOUR

Manchester City, nicknamed Cityzens, created English football history as they became the first side to win four league titles in a row. A look...

CLASSY FODEN HELPS CITY

Phil Foden, voted as the PL's Player of The Year before the match, eased the City nerves with a double strike in the first 20 minutes. West Ham competed gamely but the City juggernaut wouldn't be stopped

Phil Foden (c) scored a double as Man City beat West Ham 3-1 to win the EPL title | AP

KLOPP'S FINAL GAME

Elsewhere, Jurgen Klopp's final game as Liverpool boss formed the backdrop as the Reds were comfortable winners over Wolves | P11

SO NEAR YET SO FAR FOR ARSENAL

The North Londoners, chasing their first league title since 2004, trailed early on, but got the win they needed. However, they needed City to slip up to pip them. But Manchester City were in no mood to oblige

State govt completes 1 yr today

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

AS the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government completes one year in office on Monday, it has big challenges ahead to tackle, especially stopping alleged corruption in the government and lack of coordination between ministers and party MLAs.

Though a milestone, the government is not celebrating the anniversary in a big manner as the Model Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha elections is still in force. The plan is to hold the celebrations after the general election results on June 4.

But old issues may surface again to haunt the government and it is interesting to see how the CM will tackle them, said political analysts.

A couple of months before the Lok Sabha polls, former minister H Anjaneya had alleged that Siddaramaiah's present government is not as effective as his first tenure between 2013 and 2018 as he has no free hand. P4

Mentally ill woman spends 3 days with dead mom, dies later

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Udupi

A 32-year-old mentally ill woman spent three days with the body of her dead mother before being rescued by the police at Gopadi village in Kundapur taluk of Udupi district. But she, Pragathi Shetty, too died on Saturday, failing to respond to treatment.

Pragathi's mother Jayanthi Shetty, who was 62 years old, was suspected to have died some time early last week. Late on Thursday night, the neighbours smelt a bad stench coming from the house and called Jayanthi's mobile phone, but it went unanswered.

They then informed Gopady Gram Panchayat president Suresh Shetty, who alerted the police.

When the police forced open the door of the house, they found Jayanthi's body and Pragathi lying unconscious next to her deceased mother.

CONTINUED ON: P5

Rahul's victory margin is the point of interest in family bastion Rae Bareli

PREETHA NAIR @ Rae Bareli

FROM keeping the six-decade-long tryst with the Nehru-Gandhi family to handing defeat to Indira Gandhi, Rae Bareli has played a part in shaping major political events in the country. With the Congress fielding Rahul Gandhi from the seat this time, his election is considered a done deal. The only question is about the margin of victory. Considered a 'safe seat' for the Congress, Rae Bareli has been its citadel in the worst of times, barring Indira's defeat in 1977.

For the same reason, the Congress's main rival, the BJP, has been attacking Rahul for running away from another family pocket borough, Amethi. However, the Congress has been projecting the family's emotional connect and legacy as the reasons for his contest from Rae Bareli, which was represented by his mother Sonia Gandhi for two decades from 2004.

As for the BJP, its candidate and state minister Dinesh Pratap Singh is fighting for the second time from Rae Bareli. Singh lost to Sonia in the 2019 polls. While the BJP's campaign was focused more on the Ram temple and the Modi government's welfare schemes, rebellion from the party's Rae Bareli Sadar MLA Aditi Singh was an internal challenge. "Some leaders have been bickering over ticket distribution. Dinesh Singh is also facing trouble from his constituency over land deals. The party should have fielded a stronger candidate," said a BJP leader.

SHOWTIME FOR GLADIATORS

The Congress ran a high-octane campaign steered by party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi to build the narrative around the Nehru-Gandhi family's 100-year connection to Rae Bareli. Sonia's speech also struck a chord with the people. "It was an emotional speech. This is a Gandhi family stronghold and the result is a foregone conclusion. We expect that Rahul will win by a margin of 5 lakh votes," says Monu Misra, who runs a tea shop.

Another resident Jitendra Yadav talks about the development works by the Gandhi family. "They brought a Rail Coach Factory, National Thermal Power Corporation, AIIMS, Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Petroleum Technology, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Udan Academy and Footwear Design Development Institute among others," he says.

Samajwadi Party leader Y P Yadav, who contested the 2022 Assembly polls, says: "Workers from both parties are working to ensure a record victory for Rahul."

The Gandhi family's association with the constituency began in 1952, with the election of Feroze Gandhi, Indira's husband. Later Indira and Sonia represented it in the Lok Sabha.

ILLUSTRATION: MANDAR PARDIKAR

Rahul Gandhi (left) and Dinesh Pratap Singh